A Single Decision (Take Two)

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Aboard Invisible Hand, on that fateful day above Coruscant, Grievous makes a choice that causes a few little changes for the Separatists and Republic alike. [rewrite of a much older story]

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Chapter 2

In the distance, the thunder of war rumbled; but here, all was still. Esera Komara dragged herself down the ravine, its unnatural straightness the only sign this had once been a street. Great mountains of rubble soared up on either side. From their peaks she knew she could see all the other piles of debris, the remains of what had once been a city. One by one, the great towers and halls had been demolished, more often by the defending Shumavarans than by Republic guns.

"Do you think they'll ever rebuild it?" asked Thamyris, the commander of the 783rd Legion. They'd come to Shumavar in armor that gleamed white and red, fresh from their cloning facility, but it now was painted grey and brown, encrusted with soot and dust. Esera was surprised she hadn't poisoned her lungs, there was so much dust in the air.

"That depends, Commander." she said, climbing over what might have been a support beam. "Did we leave anyone alive to rebuild this place?"

"Someone's got to be firing those guns out there. The west side of the city is still in Seppie hands, even after all this." Thamyris said. His gaze rested on a ruined hulk of an AT-TE, rent wide open by an anti-armor missile that had streaked down from a half-demolished apartment block. That had only been a week ago, but it felt like a lifetime had passed. No one had slept more than a few hours in the last few days. Not until the Governor had decided enough was enough. "That gas worked better than I thought, I'll say. Poor fools didn't even have sealed helmets. Governor Dorthan was right, we should have deployed it the moment this turned into a street-by-street fight."

Esera felt the shame return again. She should have said something against using that weapon. Nothing about that level of slaughter felt right, even less than this entire war did. But she'd been so tired of the fighting, she just wanted it to end. Letting the Loyalist militia do the dirty work had seemed so easy. "I wonder what they felt... Crouching in some dark hole, trapped like animals and choked by some invisible miasma." They'd found dozens of Shumavaran corpses in piles, huddling together in their final gasping moments. Dressed in mismatched uniforms, many without even a proper helmet or a single piece of body armor, clutching home-made blasters and slugthrowers, still wearing their blue armbands with that white hexagon.

"Forgive me if I don't feel much sympathy after what they've put us through." Thamyris grumbled. "A quarter of our entire legion is dead, wounded, or sick. And we've only been here a few months. I'm not sure how those boys from the 14th lasted as long as they have!"

"This isn't the first time I've seen this, Commander." said Esera.

"Seen what? A bunch of fools who didn't know when to quit get gassed by the locals?" Thamyris waved at all the rubble surrounding them as they continued on. "I don't know what they were thinking, honestly. A rag-tag band of volunteers against the Grand Army of the Republic?"

"They fought as bravely as any clone."

"I hate to say it, General, but they *were* brave." said Thamyris. "They were completely outmatched. And yet..." He shook his head, and fussed with the rifle slung over his shoulder. "A twenty-five percent casualty rate, can you believe that?"

"Never underestimate the will to fight, Commander." Esera could still smell the smoke of fires somewhere; acrid and stinging fumes from burning industrial material. "Like I said, I've seen it before. People with their backs to the wall and only death before them will quite often lose their fear of death."

"But why?" Thamyris asked. "I'm just a clone, all the Republic requires of me is that I die fighting. I've got no other purpose, so I'm happy to have that. But didn't these insurgents have families and lives? Why throw that away when the battle is already decided? I just don't get it, General."

"Use that brain of yours, Thamyris." Esera said. "Shumavar's Governor isn't exactly a merciful man."

"True..."

"Can you think of any reason why a Separatist would fight to the death rather than surrender to him?"

"He *does* have a tendency to look the other way when it comes to certain wrong-doings by friendly irregulars, yes." Thamyris shrugged. "Those men they hanged were insurgents, anyway, they had it coming."

"What? You would hang a fourteen year old boy?"

"That's not too much older than a clone trooper. And you were fourteen when you fought your first battle, right?"

"That's different! I'm a Jedi, not a prisoner." Esera inhaled deeply to calm herself, too deeply; she coughed out dust. "Murder is not the Jedi way." she muttered, brushing a dark strand of hair out of her face.

"*Execution of disarmed enemy forces.*" Thamyris corrected. "That's what Governor Dorthan called it. The Separatists brought this down on themselves; they committed treason, they rebelled, they provided aid for the enemy, they fought against a lawful restoration of order, why shouldn't they die? Yes, our allies got carried away in doing justice, but it was completely understandable, after everything these insurgents have put us, and them, through. And our Loyalist friends have been fighting this battle a lot longer than we have."

Esera could only shake her head. "It's not the Jedi way." she said again. "My master told me never to be eager to deal out death and judgment."

"Try telling that to General Aspar." laughed Thamyris. Ardabur Aspar was the other Jedi here, leading the 14th Legion, a far more veteran bunch than the 783rd. Something about that man made her feel uneasy whenever she was near. She shouldn't have felt out of place at all during war meetings with Aspar, Governor Dorthan, and the clones; it was essentially a human-only affair in an increasingly pro-human political environment. But she was always quick to dismiss herself from their presence. *It's the eyes,* Esera thought. There was a wildness in Aspar, one that rubbed her the wrong way. Esera was sure he had been made a Jedi knight out of desperation and nothing more, just like her; a stop-gap attempt to put more officers in the field. Unlike Esera, though, Aspar seemed to enjoy what he did. He seemed to enjoy it *too* much.

The two came to a more open area, at the end of the ravine of wreckage, where troopers were scanning for any hidden dangers. "Report." Thamyris barked.

"No IEDs detected, sir. No mines either, and no traps." a clone with a scanner said. "The road is clear."

"Tell the tanks they're clear to move up." Thamyris said, waving an arm back down the ravine. "Finally, we're at the river!" Across the ravaged field, they could see water and the pillars of a bridge that was no longer there. "I don't like this open area, though. The buildings on the other side have good vantage points on us over here. We should level the waterfront before making any attempt at crossing."

"Yes, that looks like the best way." Esera nodded. "The west side is much smaller, the fighting shouldn't be as strong. Once we hold both banks, they'll have to surrender. Governor Dorthan's militia is only twenty kilometers away, and there's no natural defense between this river and him. A breakout will no longer be possible."

"I don't think they'll surrender." Thamyris drummed his fingers on a block of fallen stone facade. "They'll hold out in the west city until the Governor and his men arrive."

"I hope not... None of us can take much more of this. Two weeks to drive them into the hills and east city, fourteen and counting to drive them out. Madness."

"Why didn't we just bomb the city until nothing was left?"

This clone and his questions... Esera frowned. "Do you have any idea of how that would look? The Republic slaughtering an entire city? That's not what we do."

"I'm telling you, we'd only need to do it once, and every other holdout on this blasted world would fall straight into line."

"Or they'd never stop fighting us. No, Commander, if we show mercy to a defeated foe, the others will see that we are perfectly capable of being reasonable and compassionate. Including the commanders of the last droid forces south of here." How many times she'd told that to the others, Esera had lost count...

"Compassion doesn't win wars."

...And, as usual, no one listened to her. "Brutality doesn't win peace." Esera said back.

"We're not at peace, General."

To that, though, she could say nothing. *He's right*. The Republic hadn't been at peace for three years. No one forgot that. What everyone did seem to forget that sooner or later the war would end... Hopefully soon, with the Outer Rim Sieges coming along slowly but surely. Grievous's droid armies would run out of refuges soon enough-

A shot rang out, and one of the clones sweeping for explosives dropped dead.

"Sniper!" someone shouted. Esera's lightsaber flashed on, just in time for the green blade to bounce a red beam into the air. Another clone was dropped, and they all ran for the safety ravine. Then came a sharp *crack!* and a strange buzz. Then another! She raised her blade instinctively, but the projectile went right through it and into her leg. Down she went.

"Slugthrowers!" Thamyris growled. Esera just clenched her jaw shut to not cry out. She'd been shot by blasters before, but this was a new pain. One of the clones pulled her back into the rubble. "General, are you alright?"

"I'll live." said Esera through grit teeth, touching the wound just above the knee. It was bleeding, like she had been cut. "What happened?"

"It's solid ammunition, General." a clone said. "Lightsabers can't block them, only heat them up a little when they pass through."

"Why haven't they given the droids those weapons?" she asked, drawing on the Force to dull out the pain. *I should have been a healer,* Esera thought, and not for the first time.

"They're exponentially harder to learn." said Thamyris. "A blaster fires straight and true, a slug's trajectory drops as it travels, and no one gun shoots the same."

"And ammunition is a nightmare, logistically speaking. Not to mention, heavy and expensive." another clone chimed in. He had a medic's marking on his helmet, and wasted no time in breaking out his kit.

"Oh, and our armor is mostly slugproof." remarked a third. "Whoever that sniper was, he was probably waiting just for you! Must have been hoping he'd drop you sooner in the open, and make us choose between exposing ourselves and saving you. Typical sniper strategy, really. I heard a fellow in third company managed to get it to work on droids once."

"Well, General, the slug went right into your femur." the medic said. "As far as I can tell, it's easily treatable with the right gear, so we'll need to get you back to base."

Back to base it was. The rest of Esera's day was spent in the makeshift hospital they'd set up in an abandoned school. The medical droids did their work and assured her she'd be back on her feet in a few days. She was going to get caught up on paperwork and reports that no one actually read, if Thamyris and some of his troopers hadn't barged into her room early in the morning.

"General, General Komara!" the Commander shouted, helmet off and gear absent.

"What- what's going on?" Esera asked. "Are we under attack?"

Thamyris shoved a datapad in her face, opened to a Holonet News headline. "Grievous attacked Coruscant last night! The Chancellor is dead!"

It was evident the past day had been a jubilant one, at least as far as life on the coreship *Unlimited Projection* was concerned. The natives on Utapau had been quiet and somber as ever, though some seemed troubled by what they saw coming across the Holonet.

Grievous found himself met with great and unexpected fanfare; blue and white Confederate banners hung from the hangar rafters, the droids were lined up in formation, and the organic crew, workers, and local supporters gave him a thunderous cheer when his shuttle's doors open. He had planned to rush straight to the communications room, but he strode calmly down the ramp and onto the deck, staring ahead as if he heard none of the commotion around him. It must have been quite the sight for the cameras, though Grievous wasn't sure if they were actually filming or not.

"Long live the Confederacy!" many people shouted.

"Thus to all tyrants!" proclaimed others.

Nute Gunray, his sworn foe, even gave him a polite nod as he passed!

If only I could have killed Palpatine myself. But avoiding a fight with Skywalker might have been a turn for the best, he thought, as he suppressed a cough. It was several days after Windu's attack, and he still did not feel ready for a fight. Grievous had expected himself to be in a foul mood for the rest of the voyage over the brain chips San Hill had planted in him, but the discovery that his magnaguards had successfully contained Kenobi without incident, and the recognition of his marvelous victory were enough to keep him in good spirits. It was so rare for things to go so right! He didn't even feel like throttling the treacherous San Hill now. When Grievous finally finished the long walk to the lift, he let the built-up wheezing and hacking take him, the walls supporting him for a moment.

Sidious's orders had been to contact him immediately upon his return from Coruscant, if Sidious didn't contact him first. He was going to have to explain Dooku's death... A twinge of worry wiggled its way into what was left of his gut. The Sith lord was not as forgiving as Dooku. But at least he had apparently captured Obi-Wan Kenobi, one of the greatest generals of the Republic. And not to mention, he'd gone above and beyond what his orders specified – not only was the Republic's leader dead, but their greatest hero was too! That would have to please Sidious, surely!

Minutes slipped by, and Grievous tapped his fingers on the console. Nothing happened for a minute. Three minutes. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Only silence. He hated the idea of leaving a message with Sidious, as if he were some petty social caller, but it was the only choice before him.

"Lord Sidious," Grievous began with a bow, recording himself on the holoprojector, "I have succeeded beyond all our expectations at Coruscant. Chancellor Palpatine is dead, and so is that braggart Anakin Skywalker. I have taken the Jedi Obi-Wan Kenobi into custody as well. I would execute him, but... We have a problem: Count Dooku was killed in the battle too. I am unsure of how to proceed, and await your instruction. Until then, I will carry on as I see fit. Grievous out." Sidious would have to deal with the bluntness, Grievous had other work to do.

And dirty work, at that. The *civilians* had to be dealt with now; the greedy vultures who had set up shop in one of the other hangars in the coreship. *Gunray and his ilk...* Dooku got on well enough with them, but he? The great general of the Separatists, who fought battles and defied the odds, versus those corporate executives who hid under tables when the bombs fell? To deal with these insects was demeaning!

"Ah, General!" Viceroy Gunray greeted, being the first to stand at his presence. "I congratulate you on your magnificent victory! I always knew you had it in you!"

Have you now? Grievous thought, wishing he could frown to spite the Nemoidian.

"Yes, indeed!" San Hill chimed in. "You've gone beyond all expectations this time!"

"We've struck a glorious blow for the Confederacy!" said Wat Tambor, clenching a fist.

"Yes, yes," Grievous waved his hand at them, gesturing for his magnaguards to bring in today's show-and-tell for the civilians. "Palpatine is dead, Skywalker is dead, Kenobi is in our custody. All as planned."

"*Let me remind this council that we have only struck a pinprick to their heart, while they break our arms.*" Poggle the Lesser said, clicking and chirping in his people's tongue. "*The war is far from over.*"

"The war will go on-" agreed Grievous, before being interrupted by a harsh fit of coughing. He had to wait a few moments for it to subside, leaving the civilians to sit awkwardly. When it was over, Grievous went on like nothing had happened: "I accepted this transformation, this body, for two reasons, as some of you know." He looked pointedly at San Hill. "First, so that I could crush the Republic. Second, so that I might continue my revenge against the Jedi. Neither is complete. But my only term was this: that my mind not be tampered with!"

He produced a small transparent bag from his cloak: in it, the two chips A-4D removed from his brain, which he tossed onto the long table. There was silence from the civilians.

"My term was violated from the very start. Someone here today willingly committed this act." Grievous looked at all of them, his baleful glare resting on San Hill a little longer. The Muun sat very still, and did not meet his eyes. "Someone here today should be glad that I need his resources. Someone here today should be very thankful that I do not tear him apart with my own two hands!" He sank his talons into the hangar deck, sending a shrill shriek through the hall. San Hill dabbed his sweaty brow with a handkerchief, still avoiding looking at Grievous. *Let him squirm,* he thought, enjoying the Muun's anxiety. "But for now, I can let my vengeance wait. There is something else we must attend to. Bring him in."

The magnaguards pushed in a casket on a repulsor sled. "What is this?" Gunray asked. "I thought you jettisoned the bodies into space."

"Not this body." Grievous opened the casket, and revealed the re-assembled corpse of Count Dooku. A murmur ran through the Council, there were expressions of dismay and shock. "An unfortunate loss, I'm sure you'd agree."

"This is... unexpected, General." said Wat Tambor. "What happened?"

"Skywalker killed him." said Grievous, before coughing again. "Now that Dooku is dead, I am in full control of this war." More murmuring, this time with an undertone of worry and anger. "I expect your full cooperation."

"We have a very delicate arrangement, currently..." Passel Argente said, looking at his compatriots.

"Do you?" Grievous walked to and fro in front of the Council's table, hands folded behind his back.

"Yes, General." said Gunray. He rubbed his hands together nervously. "Our resources are available, to a certain extent, but we must be careful not to appear too much on the Confederacy's side. So that our assets in the Republic are not seized, and the galactic economy does not collapse..."

"And if it were to collapse?" asked Grievous, pausing in front of the Viceroy. The Viceroy paled at the prospect.

"Unthinkable!" he whispered.

"Disaster! It would... be..." Argente trailed off the moment Grievous looked at him, shrinking into his chair.

"I for one," Wat Tambor stood, placing a fist over his heart and looking up into the air like the subject of some heroic painting, "would gladly crash this economy if it meant victory for our valiant cause! The Techno Union is at your disposal, General."

"Shut up, you idiot!" hissed San Hill, tugging on Tambor's arm, trying to make him sit down.

"*Geonosis has been wholly for the Separatist cause since the start. War is our business.*" Poggle the Lesser said, giving a disdaining look to the other members.

"At least two of you aren't entirely pathetic." muttered Grievous. "For now, we will continue the arrangement as Dooku had it. But know that I am not as forgiving as he was. If you tell anyone the Count is dead before the time is right, there will be a price to pay. If you work against me, there will be a price to pay. If you so much as deny me *anything* that would effect the outcome of this war, as you have in the past, there will be a price to pay. Is that understood?" They all nodded, as he suspected they would. "You are dismissed, except for you, Viceroy."

The Council hastily departed, with the exception of Tambor and Poggle, who bowed respectfully before leaving. That left a very uncomfortable Gunray alone at the table.

"I assure you, General," he said, "I have done nothing!"

"Not today, at least." Grievous said. "There is one final matter I could not discuss in front of the others. Only you and Dooku truly knew of it, besides myself."

"I have no idea-"

"Lord Sidious."

"Ah..." The Viceroy became even more nervous, his breaths shallow and fast. It was joked that Nemoidians had a whole organ devoted to worrying, but Grievous had long thought it actually true. "Is he... displeased with us?"

"Not as far as I know. In fact, I know nothing of all about his current mood. He has failed to contact me, or respond to any attempt of mine. You and I are the only two left alive who have ever spoken to him directly. Perhaps you know of a way to contact him?"

"I have never even seen him face to face." said Gunray. "He only appeared in holograms, and only then when it was convenient for him."

"Then I was closer to him than you, it seems." It was hard to forget that run-in with Maul, which had ended up with Sidious himself coming out in person to play. "Dooku mentioned he had influence on Coruscant... Perhaps my friendly visit left him with communication problems?" The thought was pleasing. Perhaps he should take this opportunity to seize all the information he could while Sidious was out of the picture? Yes, that did sound good.

"It is entirely possible!" Gunray nodded vigorously. *If his head moves any faster, that stupid hat is going to fall off!* Grievous hoped it did.

"I am going to access all of Dooku's records and find out what I can. I have a task for you too, Viceroy; one that might put you in my good favor for once." Grievous leaned forward, towering over the Nemoidian and casting his shadow on him.

"Y-yes?" stammered Gunray, trembling like a plucked bowstring.

"I want the every piece of data you have on Sidious. Including transcripts of your communications."

"Of course, you will have it as soon as it can be readied."

"Excellent." He stepped back, and Gunray sighed in relief. "You may prove too useful to kill yet. Now, go." The Viceroy didn't need to be told twice.

What now? He asked himself. Normally he'd wait for orders from one of the Sith lords, but neither was available to give any. For the moment, Grievous was free to do as he pleased... He left the hangar, and wandered about the coreship with magnaguards in tow, ignoring the salutes droid and organic alike gave.

Grievous emerged from the coreship, finding himself in one of open roads that spiraled up and down the sinkhole of Pau City. The sun was warm on what little remained of his flesh, and a calm breeze tugged at his cloak. A distant recollection of *something* chimed in his mind, but nothing more than a pleasant feeling came of it. The Council had been sufficiently threatened, San Hill had been terrified, Sidious was not able to bother him, a great victory had been won, and his mind was his own again... *Yes, this is a good day,* he thought. Perhaps he'd just enjoy a peaceful afternoon for once. The idea was strangely appealing.

The built-in communicator in his wrist chimed. *Or perhaps not.* "Yes?" he answered.

A hologram of his flagship's captain appeared. "General." Dofine saluted. "I apologize if I am disturbing you, but the fleet commanders and I are gathering for a celebration in the main conference room here. We would be most honored if you would grace us with your presence. After all, you did lead us to victory."

Grievous suppressed a groan. Nemoidians loved their formal occasions, and if there was one thing Grievous hated, it was formal occasions. He was in charge now, though, he didn't have to go. But, it was a good day so far, and the Separatist's finest had shown their mettle... "Very well." he said. "I will come, but only because you manage not to sicken me."

"...a toast then, to our fearsome and victorious General!" Captain Dofine raised a glass, and so did all the other organic captains and commanders that had just returned triumphant from Coruscant, now gathered in the ceremonial hall of *Unlimited Projection*.

"Long may he live!" they exclaimed. Grievous just stood next to Dofine, hands behind his back, looking bored. Kronaak weakly waved his bone walking stick, along with many more enthusiastic officers.

The cheerful murmur returned to its previous levels. But Captain Kronaak of the *Lucrehulk* battleship *Aethra* fell back into self-reflection. He had become convinced that the past week had been his peak in life. From chattel, to refugee, to soldier, to officer, to captain; a career that had found its finest hour taking part in the most daring military operation in a millennium.

The last six months had been grueling, physically and spiritually, for all loyal Separatists. Retreat after retreat, loss after loss, world after world fallen to the Republic's onslaught. Despair set in among his fellow officers, morale sank ever lower. All the great soldiers were being killed, one by one. Admiral Trench, Grievous's favored warrior, had died just three months ago. And then Grievous had summoned him to Thyffera, one of their last holdings in the inner rim. Kronaak, along with dozens of other officers of the Confederate Navy, had come in secret with their ships to a great staging area. On the hangar deck of *Invisible Hand*, General Grievous and Count Dooku themselves briefed them on their mission: to strike Coruscant itself.

The Outer Rim Sieges, as bad as they were for the Confederacy, had drawn the bulk of Republic strength far from their capital. Coruscant was the last place anyone expected Grievous to turn up. They were spread so thin it would be hours, maybe even days, before any help could arrive. But Confederate spies had found a chart of an ancient and forgotten hyperspace route through the Deep Core, one the Republic did not know of. The time had come to stab at the rotten and corrupt heart of the foe.

And stab they did.

It had truly been glorious! The tension of the stealthy flight in, the excitement of listening to unsuspecting enemy transmissions as they approached, the wrathful glee that came from being a demon unleashed in the garden of paradise, raining down fire and terror on the decadent filth who had caused them so much misery and hardship... He'd even taken a moment to send some turbolaser shots into the Senate district. Kronaak had been more alive than he ever had been before. But best of all had been watching the broadcast of Grievous dumping the dictator Palpatine's body into space like the garbage it was. Far away on Minntooine, his clan must have been celebrating like everyone else, having no idea yet that one of their sons had partaken in such a feat. The giddy mood had persisted for the entire escape back to Utapau. It had been like getting away with the greatest heist ever made. That wasn't too far from the truth, actually-

"You must be Captain Kronaak."

"Mmmh-? General Grievous!" Kronaak snapped out of his thoughts, and saluted. The cyborg was at his eye level while hunched over. With Grievous was Lushros Dofine, his favored captain.

"I have seen one of your kind before." Grievous said, between coughs. "A ten legged crab-man. He was a Jedi."

I only use six legs to walk, Kronaak wanted to say. But he went with a safer response: "I am sorry to hear that, General. But I have never known one of my race to be a Jedi. We have only been free to choose our own destiny for a very short time." Kronaak clicked his claws together.

"You are a Viraanntesse, yes? From Vvaw?" There was a subtle anger in his voice.

"I do not mean to be comedic, sir, but I am not sure."

Grievous's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean, *you are not sure?*"

"I was born on Siskeen, sir. When Tar-Mairon seized power, he freed all the property of his enemies, including my people." Kronaak explained, resisting the urge to stand taller in challenge.

"You are a slave?" asked Dofine.

"In a manner of speaking, I *was*. Tar-Mairon suggested my people move to Minntooine, and that's where I joined our fleet. Months before the war even began, sir."

"And now you are a captain of a battleship." said Grievous, eyes still narrowed, but the anger gone. He stepped backwards, and tilted his head.

"Captain Kronaak has displayed considerable talent over the past year. His squadron was the force guarding our right flank during the escape from Coruscant, sir." Dofine interjected, clasping his hands. "He kept six star destroyers off us while you dealt with the Chancellor and Skywalker."

"I assumed he was a skilled tactician to be among the warriors here." Grievous looked about the room, the anger returning to his voice. "I will be blunt: I have an intense dislike for your people."

Kronaak's four eyes blinked in surprise. "Really, now?"

"Do not take that tone with me, crab-man!" snapped Grievous, sticking a finger in his face. "Consider yourself lucky that I am in a good mood. You have fought well, and if you continue to fight well, you may redeem your race yet." With that, the cyborg turned about, cloak swirling, and stalked off, coughing all the while.

"Captain Dofine," said Kronaak, turning towards the Nemoidian, "do you know what my people did wrong?"

"It's a mystery to me, too. I presume it's because one of them was a Jed." Dofine put a hand on his chin, before smiling. "Do not feel too upset over it, though, the General hates everyone equally."

"That is a re-assuring thought."

Not many people were eager to approach fearsome and tall creature like Kronaak. Six legs, four arms, four eyes, two mandible sets, and enough carapace to shrug off blasters did tend to scare the smaller bipeds. *I'm no crab,* Kronaak thought, with Grievous's comment in mind. Crabs were for eating, Kronaak's kind were not, no matter what those vermin on Siskeen had thought. Tar-Mairon excluded, of course. Kronaak and his kin stood tall, walking upright, not scuttling about, prone to the ground, like little animals. They even wore clothes, like any Nemoidian, Quarren, or Human! *Crab!* Woe to Kronaak,

bound by protocol as he was. He wondered if the Jedi of his race Grievous had mentioned ever punished anyone for calling him a crab... *Who could have thought one of us could become a Jedi?*

Kronaak returned to his guest chamber after the event had ended. Before he slept in the makeshift water bath he'd made, he contacted his second-in-command back on *Aethra*. "27, is there anything to report?"

"No, sir." answered the yellow-marked battle-droid. "Repairs and re-stocking are going along at expected pace. We'll be fully operational in no time!"

"Good, good... Kronaak out."

Author's really wordy notes because he likes to hear himself talk: General Grievous metaphorically spits in the face of acceptable social conduct, and our cast of characters, both point of view and secondary, will only grow larger from here. I apologize to the reviewer who wished for less jumping around between points of view, it is necessary for the way this story is told, but every single one of them has a purpose for being there. I hope he is assured that I am doing my best to present a balanced perspective on this conflict, though. The unsavory actions committed on Shumavar are the fault of a pro-Republic militia, not the Republic itself; their reasons for being so edgy will come up later. But I'm a guy who thinks the 2008 cartoon is actually in-universe pro-Republic propaganda (at least the parts that don't focus on based Sheev's double-dealing), so... yeah. I am highly biased, it's something I have to work around. Anyways, with the Empire's formation only weeks away in the main Star Wars timeline, I believe that Chancellor Sheev had already begun placing brutal men like the mentioned Governor in positions of power. And the Clone Wars show showed us that Jedi do lose faith in the Jedi way thanks to the war, or the war causes them to lose faith in other things. I strive to present emotionally believable logic in my characters (rational logic alone is bad for storytelling).

To the other reviewers, Ahsoka Tano is alive and I do not intend to kill her just for the hell of it. I actually really like how she developed over the course of the show, maybe she'll turn up later, or maybe not. Read and find out. Shaak Ti will not be the Jedi main character in this story, she will not be the defector. Gee, I wonder who it is then? And for my final note, I apologize about the delay in posting this. There have been technical issues which prevented me from getting to my documents for five days. I hope to update on Fridays from now on, God knows I have enough chapters pre-written to give me time to stay ahead of my schedule. See you next time, nerds.

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